

Department of Human Services

Providing additional monies for the primary care of uninsured residents, fixing the Hawai'i Rx prescription drug program and addressing the issue of long-term care are among the department's accomplishments this legislative session. Other accomplishments include enhancing safety for the elderly and disabled and expanding affordable housing and nursing care capacity.

The department's top two priorities were both approved by the legislature with few or no amendments. These bills relate to Medicaid reimbursement equity (SB2929) and home- and community-based services (SB2930). The new laws help ensure that safe, quality, long-term nursing care options are available for Hawaii's elderly and disabled by expanding the capacity for residential care and giving greater choice to our aging residents.

In 2003 the Hawaii Uninsured Project held a conference to address the state's growing number of uninsured residents. Many of the resulting recommendations were included in the Governor's initiatives and implemented through the department. For example, the Governor requested \$5 million to help the uninsured, and \$2 million was allocated by the legislature.

Moreover, the department successfully lobbied the legislature to restore numerous vacant positions that are completely funded by the federal government (SB1491). Cutting those positions served no meaningful purpose, while harming the department's ability to properly fill those job openings in a timely manner.

Approximately 300,000 people in Hawai'i suffer from high prescription drug costs because they lack insurance coverage. These people were helped by new legislation (SB3237) that maximizes prescription drug discounts, reduces government costs and streamlines the eligibility process for fast enrollment.

And to help low-income, legal immigrants who are pregnant, the department worked with the legislature to pass a bill (SB2936) that created a new eligibility group for these women.

Not all of the department's accomplishments required legislative action. For example, in January 2004 the department began a new enrollment process that makes it much easier for children and pregnant women to obtain access to quality health care. Dubbed the "pinkie" form because of its color, the streamlined and simplified application has resulted in an additional 1,600 children being enrolled in just two months. Also, 303 pregnant women were enrolled, ensuring they receive critical pre-natal care.

DHS is also working to have Hawai'i join a multi-state Medicaid drug pooling program. This will allow Hawai'i to join with other states in negotiating greater discounts from pharmaceutical manufacturers.

- Lillian Koller, Director